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A PATH FORWARD

There's no place like home – right?

By STEVEN P. DINKIN

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You made it through week one of the school shutdown, in the face of the coronavirus pandemic. It wasn't that bad, was it? Instead of hustling out the door in the morning, maybe you enjoyed a second cup of coffee (or actually finished your first cup). And you're beginning to get the hang of telecommuting.

But week two looms large, and San Diego Unified schools won't reopen until April 6, at least. How do you keep the peace and make sure that learning continues, while staying productive yourself? After all, as a telecommuter, you're not doing different work – you're doing the same work in a different location.

There's another challenge: too much togetherness. A colleague just shared a sobering article in the *Daily Mail*. The headline reads, "Divorce rate spikes across China after 'couples spend too much time together during coronavirus home quarantine,' officials claim." One office saw more than 300 couples applying for divorces in the last three weeks; another set a cap, allowing no more than 10 couples to divorce a day.

So, more than just keeping the peace, how can you achieve happiness during this time of uber-household connectedness? Here are five useful tips for week two and beyond:

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1. Hold a family meeting (even if you're a household of two): Let every family member talk about what they want to get out of this "break." Agree on a plan for tackling the chores that still need to get done. Set a daily schedule.

Alexandra Stockwell, a business owner who home-schools her four children, writes in *Vox*, "The best schedule is one that is spacious and flexible, and builds in plenty of independent learning and play time for kids and reliable break times for me." She begins with breakfast and divides the day into two-hour increments until dinner.



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3. Check-in: How are things going? A daily download of what's working and what isn't — perhaps at the dinner table — can allow you to course correct before things get out of hand. Be sure to listen to each other and ask for support, when needed.

4. Maintain a sense of humor: Finding the funny is a known stress buster. Start your day with a smile (even if you have to fake it). Interject a surprise, something you normally wouldn't do as a family: wear pajamas all day.

5. Be compassionate: Acknowledge that social distancing, our new normal, isn't easy for any of you (second cup of coffee aside). There will be good days and bad — and with them, times to give and receive special kindness.

Your outlook will be a determinant of your family's experience. In a Washington Post "On Parenting" column, clinical social worker Carla Naumburg writes, "Although I would love to blame my daughters for their behavior, the reality is that my reactions to them undoubtedly set the stage for what comes next. When I am calm and flexible, able to distract and deflect rather than reacting from a place of rigidity or annoyance, my girls generally respond in kind. When I don't take care of myself, I'm like a big, red, glowing button just waiting to be pushed."

This is uncharted territory, to be sure. If all else fails, turn to the family dog, who's happy to have you at home.

Dinkin is president of the National Conflict Resolution Center, a San Diego-based organization working to create innovative solutions to challenging issues, including intolerance and incivility. NCRC is nationally recognized for its conflict management and communication strategies. To learn about NCRC's programming, visit nrcrconline.com

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